

CHAPTER 4

NOISE ABATEMENT AND HEARING CONSERVATION

4.1 PURPOSE

This Chapter sets forth the policy for administering a noise abatement and hearing conservation program within the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

4.2 POLICY

It is AMS policy that each commodity program develop and implement a noise abatement and hearing conservation program which controls workplace noise and protects AMS employees from occupational noise-induced hearing loss. This program shall meet the minimum requirements of the this chapter and those contained in the Occupational Safety and Health Administrations (OSHA) 29 CFR Part 1910.95, Occupational Noise Exposure.

3. DEFINITIONS

Action level. An 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels measured on the A weighted scale of a sound level meter (slow response), or a dose of 50 percent.

Audiogram. A chart, graph, or table resulting from an audiometric test showing an individuals hearing threshold levels as a function of frequency.

dBA. A sound level reading in decibels made on the A-weighted scale of a sound level meter.

Decibel. A unit of measurement of sound level.

Time-weighted average (TWA). The sound level which, if constant over an 8-hour exposure, would result in the same noise dose as is measured.

4.4 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- A. AMS programs shall identify each workplace operation(s) or equipment in which noise level(s) are 85 dBA or higher based on an 8-hour TWA.
- A. As a minimum, programs shall implement a hearing conservation program in work areas or for tasks where daily noise levels exceed an 8-hour TWA of 85 dBA.
- C. All employees with exposures at or above the 8-hour TWA of 85 dBA must have hearing protection available and be encouraged to wear them routinely to prevent hearing damage. Only employees exposed to an 8-hour TWA of 90 dBA and above or impulse noise and employees who have experienced a hearing loss, are required to wear hearing protection.
- A. When employees are subjected to noise exceeding a TWA of 90 dBA, feasible administrative, engineering, or personal protective equipment controls must be implemented to reduce noise exposure.
- B. Any employee who suspects he/she may be exposed to excessive noise levels should

contact their supervisor.

4.5 GENERAL

In situations where AMS is considered to be a contractor and/or performs work in establishments of private employers, the private employer's hearing/noise conservation program procedures and requirements (including monitoring results) shall be followed, unless or they are found not to meet the minimum requirements in 29 CFR Part 1910.95, or otherwise indicated.

4.6 NOISE ASSESSMENT/MONITORING

- A. An industrial hygienist or an appropriately trained competent person must perform noise assessments.
- B. When employee exposure levels are less than 85 dBA, no further action is required.
- C. Monitoring shall be repeated when changes in production, process, or controls alter the noise exposure of any employee.

4.7 EMPLOYEE NOTIFICATION

Employees shall be notified, in writing, when the results of monitoring indicates exposure at or above the 8-hour TWA of 85 decibels.

4.8 MEDICAL SURVEILLANCE

- A. Employees who have an occupational noise exposure at or above the action level of 85 dBA 8-hour TWA shall take part in annual audiometric testing after a baseline has been established.
- B. The baseline audiogram must be provided within 6 months of an employee's exposure to noise that equals or exceeds the action level.
- C. Testing shall be provided at no cost to affected employees.

4.9 HEARING PROTECTION

- A. Hearing protection devices shall be made available to all employees exposed to the 8-hour TWA noise level of 85 dBA or above. There shall be no cost to the employee.
- A. Supervisors shall ensure that hearing protection devices are worn by employee(s) when and where required.
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- C. Supervisors shall ensure employees are provided training in the use and care of hearing protection devices.

4.10 TRAINING

Training shall be conducted annually and shall include, but not be limited to, the following information:

- A. The effects of noise on hearing;
- B. The purpose, use, advantages, and disadvantages of the hearing protection devices;
- C. The various types of devices available;
- D. Instructions on selection, fitting, use, and care of hearing protection devices;
- E. The purpose of audiometric testing and an explanation of the test procedures and results.

4.11 RECORDKEEPING

The following records shall be maintained:

- A. Training records shall be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years.
 - B. Noise exposure measurement records shall be retained for two (2) years.
 - C. Audiometric testing records shall be retained for the duration of the affected employee's employment.
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